

Chomsky: Advanced US Weaponry In Ukraine Is Sustaining Battlefield Stalemate



Noam Chomsky

It's now more than 300 days since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict has intensified rather than subsided, with Ukrainian leaders [expressing fears of impending mass infantry attacks from Russia](#) and U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken announcing this week that the U.S. will send Ukraine \$1.8 billion in military aid, including a Patriot missile battery.

On December 21, in greeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House and considering his appeal for nearly \$50 billion in additional aid for Ukraine, U.S. President Joe Biden made clear his intention to continue sending weaponry to Ukraine until Russia is defeated in the battlefield, [saying](#), "The American people have been with you every step of the way, and we will stay with you."

As Noam Chomsky alludes to in the exclusive interview that follows for *Truthout*, those driven to see Russia disappear from the world map as a major power appear determined to ensure that the war continues, damn the consequences for Ukrainians and Russians alike. Indeed, one wonders if the Cold War ever ended.

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, with every passing month, the conflict in Ukraine looks much grimmer. Both the U.S. and the EU are now deeply involved in the war, and

Biden has already pledged to support Ukraine for “as long as it takes” to defeat Russia on the battlefield. In the meantime, Zelenskyy has made some new demands for peace, but they were quickly rejected by Moscow with the argument that Kyev must take into account the current reality. Are there any historical analogies that could be useful in seeing how this war might possibly end?

Noam Chomsky: There are all too many analogues: Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Gaza, Eastern Congo, Somalia — just keeping to ongoing horrors where the U.S. and its allies have a primary or at least substantial role in perpetrating and sustaining them. Such examples, however, are not relevant to discussion of Ukraine in polite circles. They suffer from the fallacy of wrong agency: us not them. Therefore, benign intent gone awry and not reincarnation of Hitler. Since this is all a priori truth, it is not subject to discussion any more than $2+2 = 4$.

The analogues do offer some unhappy suggestions as to how this war might possibly end: by not ending until devastation is so extreme that we wouldn't want to think about it. That unfortunately seems more than likely with each passing day.

I claim no military expertise. I do follow military analysts, and find most of them supremely confident, with opposing conclusions — not for the first time. My suspicion is that General Milley, former chair of the joint chiefs, is probably right in concluding that neither side can win a decisive military victory and that the cost of continuing warfare is enormous for both sides, with many repercussions beyond.

If the war goes on, Ukraine will be the primary victim. Advanced U.S. weapons may sustain a battlefield stalemate as Russia pours in more troops and equipment, but how much can Ukrainian society tolerate now that Russia, after many months, has turned to the U.S.-U.K. style of war, directly attacking infrastructure, energy, communications, anything that allows the society to function? Ukraine is already facing a major [economic and humanitarian crisis](#). As the war persists, Ukrainian central bank officials fear that “People could flee Ukraine in droves, taking their money with them, potentially crashing the national currency as they seek to exchange their Ukrainian hryvnia for euros or dollars.”

Fortunately, ethnic Ukrainians who flee are likely to be accepted in the West. They are considered to be (almost) white, unlike those left to drown by the

thousands in the Mediterranean while fleeing from Europe's destruction of Africa, or forcefully returned to U.S.-backed terrorist states. While many may be able to flee, as matters now stand destruction of a viable society in Ukraine is likely to continue on its gruesome path.

Talk of nuclear weapons is almost all in the West, though it's all too easy to think of steps up the escalation ladder. The casual talk about nuclear war in the U.S. is shocking, disastrous.

So is the now standard line about a cosmic struggle between democracy and autocracy — eliciting ridicule outside of Western educated circles. Elsewhere, people are capable of looking at the glaringly obvious facts of past and current history and are not so deeply immersed in doctrinal fabrications that they are rendered blind.

The same is true of the tales concocted in Western propaganda about Putin's plans to conquer Europe, if not beyond, eliciting fears that coexist easily with gloating over the demonstration of Russia's military incompetence and inability even to conquer towns a few miles from its borders. Orwell called it "doublethink": the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in mind and firmly believe them both. Western doublethink is buttressed by the industry of tea leaf-reading that seeks to penetrate Putin's twisted mind, discerning all sorts of perversities and grand ambitions. The industry reverses George W. Bush's discoveries when he looked into Putin's eyes, saw his soul and recognized it to be good. And it is about as well-grounded as Bush's insights.

But reality doesn't go away. Apart from the destruction of Ukraine, there is an ever-growing possibility of nuclear war. Millions are facing starvation from disruption of grain and fertilizer shipments from the Black Sea region. Precious resources that are desperately needed to avert climate catastrophe are being wasted in destruction and sharply increased preparation for more. Europe is taking a beating, with its very natural complementary relation with Russia broken, and links to the emerging China-based system harmed as well. It's an open question whether Europe — in particular the German-based industrial system — will agree to decline by subordinating itself to Washington, a topic of far-reaching importance.

That prospect goes beyond Ukraine-Russia. Biden's virtual declaration of war

against China, with sanctions against exports to China of technology that makes use of U.S. components or designs, hits European industry hard, particularly the advanced chip-manufacturing industry in the Netherlands. So far it is not clear whether European industry will be willing to pay the costs of the U.S. effort to prevent China's economic development — framed, as usual, in terms of national security, but only the most loyal partisans can take that claim seriously.

Meanwhile the U.S. is gaining enormously in multiple ways: geopolitically by Putin's self-destructive decision to drive Europe into Washington's pocket by ignoring very real possibilities for avoiding criminal aggression, but also in other ways. It is not, of course, the U.S. population that is gaining. Rather, those in charge: fossil fuel industries, financial institutions that invest in them, military producers, the agribusiness semi-monopolies, and masters of the economy generally, who can scarcely control their euphoria over bulging profits (which are feeding inflation with markups) and great prospects for moving on to destroy human society on earth more expeditiously.

It's easy to understand why almost the whole world is calling for negotiations and a diplomatic settlement, including most of Europe, as polls indicate. Ukrainians will decide for themselves. As to what they prefer, we have clear statements by the government, but know little about the general population. The highly regarded correspondent Jonathan Steele brings to our [attention](#) a Gallup telephone poll of Ukrainians in September. It found that "Although 76 per cent of men wanted the war to continue until Russia is forced to leave all occupied territory including Crimea, and 64 per cent of women had the same view, the rest — a substantial number of people — wanted negotiations." Regional analysis showed that "In areas closest to the front lines where the horror of war is felt most keenly people's doubts about the wisdom of fighting until victory are highest. Only 58 per cent support it in southern Ukraine. In the east the figure is as low as 56 per cent."

Are there possibilities for diplomacy? The U.S. and the U.K., the two traditional warrior states, are still insisting that the war must be fought to severely weaken Russia, hence no negotiations, but even in their inner circles there is some [softening](#) in this regard.

Right now, the positions of the two adversaries seem irreconcilable, having predictably hardened as hostilities escalate. We don't know whether it is possible

to return to the positions of last March, when, according to [Ukrainian left sources](#), “Ukraine had publicly announced proposals to the Istanbul meeting on March 29, which included the withdrawal of Russian troops to the line on February 23 and the postponement of discussion about Crimea and Donbas. At the same time, the Ukrainian side insisted that all disputes should be resolved through transparent referendums held under the supervision of international observers and after the return of all forcibly displaced persons.”

The Istanbul negotiations collapsed. The source just quoted places the blame totally on Russia. Little is known, since coverage of diplomatic efforts is so scanty. In particular, we do not know whether a factor in the collapse was Britain’s opposition to negotiations, apparently backed by the U.S. Do possibilities remain? The only way to find out is to facilitate efforts to try.

At the very least we can remove obstacles to diplomacy that the U.S. has placed, topics we’ve reviewed in detail. And we can try to foster an arena of open discussion about these topics, free from tantrums and heroic posturing about high principles that dismisses the factual record and human consequences.

There are many pitfalls and dangers, but it’s hard to see what other course can save Ukraine, and far beyond, from catastrophe.

German Chancellor Scholz has described the war in Ukraine as a strategic attempt on the part of Vladimir Putin to recreate the Russian empire and stated that relations with Moscow will be reestablished once the conflict is over and Russia has been defeated. Is there any evidence that Putin’s regime is interested in reviving the Russian empire? And what happens if Russia is not defeated in the battlefield? Will Europe be dragged into a new Cold War? Indeed, does the U.S./NATO-Russia conflict over Ukraine prove that the Cold War perhaps never ended?

Scholz surely knows better. Whatever one thinks of Russian war aims, they were explicit and far narrower, and Scholz, who is well-informed, cannot fail to be aware of that.

The tea leaf-reading industry has seized on occasional comments by Putin, generally taken out of context, to conjure up the frightening images of Russia on the march. That requires an impressive subordination to doublethink, as just described.

The Cold War briefly ended when the Soviet Union collapsed. The Gorbachev-Bush I negotiations, supported by Germany, provided a basis for escaping its legacy. The hopes did not long survive.

We should not overlook the fact that the end of the Cold War also lifted the ideological clouds — briefly. Government documents recognized, indirectly, that the Cold War was in large part a tacit agreement between the superpowers to allow each to use violence when necessary to control its own domains: for Russia, eastern Europe; for the U.S., much of the world. Thus, the Bush I administration officially recognized that we have to maintain intervention forces aimed at the Middle East, where the serious problems “could not be laid at the Kremlin’s door,” contrary to decades of prevarication. Rather, they were the usual threat: independent nationalism. That didn’t change, apart from the need to design new pretexts, the menacing Russian hordes having evaporated: “humanitarian intervention” and other concoctions, lauded at home and bitterly denounced by the Global South, the traditional victims. All reviewed in detail elsewhere.

The official Cold War briefly ended. Bush I lived up to his promises to Gorbachev, but Clinton almost immediately rescinded them, initiating the expansion of NATO to Russia’s borders in violation of firm and unambiguous promises. He did so for domestic political reasons (the Polish vote etc.) as he explained to his friend Boris Yeltsin. There should be no need to review again the rest of the sordid story until today. The hope for a “common European home” with no military alliances — Gorbachev’s vision, tolerated by Bush I — was undermined by Clinton, and a form of Cold War then developed, now becoming extremely dangerous.

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel made some revealing remarks in an interview with the newspaper Die Zeit. She stated that the 2014 Minsk agreements were intended to “give Ukraine time” to make the country stronger, thus admitting that Kyev was not going to implement the peace deal and that the plan was to arm Ukraine for a large-scale conflict with Russia. Is this a case of diplomatic fraud? If so, is it a legitimate claim for launching an international tribunal?

What Merkel had in mind we do not know. We do know that there is no basis in the historical or diplomatic record for her claims. I am inclined to agree with the astute commentator who posts under the name “[Moon of Alabama](#).” He points out that “Merkel is under very harsh critique not only in the U.S. but also in her own

conservative party. She is now out to justify her previous decisions as well as the current bad outcome in Ukraine. My hunch is that she is making things up. Unfortunately she also creates serious damage.”

He proceeds to a close analysis of the texts to justify this conclusion, which is the most plausible one I’ve seen. I don’t think there’s a basis for an international tribunal. More likely it is just a case of a political figure seeking to justify herself in a highly toxic climate.

For the last couple of months or so, Russia has been launching massive attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure. What’s the strategic incentive behind these hideous types of military operations, which must surely qualify as war crimes? And what might be the implications of Ukrainian strikes inside Russia insofar as diplomatic efforts to end the war are concerned?

As we have discussed before, U.S.-U.K. strategists expected that Putin would occupy Kyev in a few days, as Russia did as well, it seems. There were plans reported to set up a Ukrainian government-in-exile. Both sides seriously underestimated Ukrainian will and capacity to resist the aggression, and radically overestimated Russian military power. U.S.-U.K. military analysts also expressed their surprise that Russia was not launching their kind of war, with immediate resort to the “hideous types of military operations” you mention. It was not hard to predict, as we did over the months, that sooner or later Russia would resort to U.S.-U.K.-Israeli tactics: Quickly destroy everything that sustains a viable society. So they are now doing, arousing justified horror among decent people — joined by those who implement or justify these tactics with the “right agency”: us. The strategic incentive is clear enough, especially after Russia’s battlefield setbacks: Destroy the economy and the will to resist. All familiar to us.

Quite definitely war crimes, whether in Iraq, or Gaza, or Ukraine.

It’s not surprising that Ukraine is seeking to strike back against Russia. So far, the U.S. government, apparently under Pentagon advice, is seeking to restrict those reactions, not sharing the willingness to see the world go up in flames expressed by many commentators in the current crazed environment.

Things could easily go wrong. One new twist is that the U.S. is planning to send Patriot anti-missile systems to Ukraine. Whether they work seems to be an [open question](#). They require a substantial military cohort, I think about 80 people,

which will presumably include American trainers. Work or not, they're a natural target for Russian attack, even during installation. What then?

Any escalation is very dangerous in itself and can only impede whatever fading chances there may be for diplomatic efforts to fend off worse catastrophe.

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